

MINUTES
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission Meeting
Helena Headquarters
1420 East 6th Avenue - Helena, MT 59620
CONFERENCE CALL
July 24, 2006

Commission Members Present: Steve Doherty, Chairman; John Brenden and Vic Workman

Fish, Wildlife & Parks Staff: Acting Director Sue Daly; Karen Zackheim, Mack Long, Pat Saffel, Bob Lane, Brandi Fisher, and Betty Warren.

Chairman Doherty called the conference call meeting to order at 4:50 p.m.

1. Emergency Safety Closure – Clark Fork River: Milltown Dam to Bandman Bridge. Chairman Doherty requested an update on the consideration of issuing an emergency closure. Mack Long, FWP Region 2 Administrator, explained that the Forest Service requested that on a moment's notice there is a need to protect floaters and anglers if helicopters are required to dip out of the river in that area for fire suppression.

Action: Brenden moved and Workman seconded the motion to approve any necessary action that the region needed for fire fighting purposes to close the section required and to get out the necessary markers and news releases needed to assist in the fire fighting. Motion carried.

2. Emergency Fishing Closure – Clark Fork River (outlet of Pond 2 on the Warm Springs Wildlife Management Area to the confluence with the Flathead River; 200 miles of river) and the Little Blackfoot River. Pat Saffel, FWP Region 2 Fisheries Manager, discussed the rising water temperatures on the Clark Fork River and the Little Blackfoot River. The Little Blackfoot River has had temperatures of 73° F for three consecutive days. Temperatures on the Clark Fork River at Alberton and Turah are ranging from 73° F to 78 ° F. Temperatures on both rivers are exceeding the threshold for closure and the continued warm temperatures are anticipated. FWP requested the Commission invoke an emergency closure of fishing between noon and midnight effective as soon as possible through September 15 unless conditions allow FWP to open sooner.

Action: Workman moved and Brenden seconded the motion that effective Thursday, July 27, through September 15, 2006, the Clark Fork River, from the outlet of Pond 2 on the Warm Springs Wildlife Management Area to the confluence with the Flathead River, be closed to fishing from noon to midnight. If conditions improve, the river may be opened sooner. Motion carried.

Workman moved and Brenden seconded the motion that effective Thursday, July 27, through September 15, 2006, the Little Blackfoot River, be closed to fishing from noon to midnight. If conditions improve, the river may be opened sooner. Motion carried.

3. Emergency Fishing Closure – Big Hole River. Karen Zackheim, FWP Fisheries Operations Bureau Chief, identified the following areas of the Big Hole River and requested that FWP be permitted to close the areas immediately when triggers specified by the Big Hole Drought Management Plan are met.

The Big Hole Drought Management Plan, administered by the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and the Big Hole Watershed Committee, separates the Big Hole River into three “drought emergency” reaches and specifies the criteria for closure of the river to fishing in each section:

Upper Big Hole

The 19-mile long **upper reach of the Big Hole River** encompasses the Big Hole River from Rock Creek Road (also known as Mark Clemow Lane) to the mouth of the North Fork of the Big Hole. The Drought Plan requires a closure when flows are 20 cfs or less at the USGS Wisdom Gage and temperatures exceed 70° degrees F. for more than 8 hours per day for three consecutive days. The river will remain closed until flows exceed 40 cfs for seven consecutive days.

Middle Big Hole

The 28-mile long **middle reach of the Big Hole River** runs from the mouth of the North Fork of the Big Hole to Dickie Bridge. The middle reach will be closed when water flows measured at USGS Mudd Creek Gauge fall below 60 cfs or temperatures exceed 70° F for over 8 hours per day for three consecutive days. The river will remain closed until flows exceed 80° cfs for seven consecutive days and temperatures do not exceed 70° F for more than 8 hours per day for three consecutive days.

Lower Big Hole

From Dickie Bridge downstream to the confluence with the Jefferson River will be closed to fishing when flows fall below 150 cfs at the Melrose USGS gauge. The river will remain closed until flows exceed 200 cfs for seven consecutive days.

Action: Brenden moved and Workman seconded the motion that if the triggers as described above are reached, the Commission gives authority to FWP to move forward to close those sections, post waters, put out news releases and do whatever else is necessary to let the public know of the action. Motion carried.

4. General Discussion.

The question was raised about providing adequate public notice on these closures. It was stated that these areas have been closed frequently over the past several years, and the public is well aware of the circumstances and need for the closures.

The discussion of fire emergencies and river closures was discussed and the need to have immediate action taken rather than each occurrence having to try to reach a quorum of the Commissioners. This process will be discussed further at the August 3 meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 5:05pm

Steve Doherty, Chairman

Susan Daly, Acting Director